The Revolutionary Camp Ground
At Plainfield, New Jersey

An address delivered before Continental Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, January 9th, 1923, by Cornelius C. Vermeule.

The local history of Plainfield has been inadequately recorded. The lack of reference to the important militia post which existed here during the Revolution and which became a cantonment again in 1799, when war was threatened with France; the overlooking of the fact that Washington made his headquarters at the Vermeule homestead during the battle of Short Hills, the failure to recognize the importance of that battle, in which many more troops were engaged on both sides and much more was at stake than at the battle of Springfield, in 1780, are remarkable oversights. No local historian, indigenous to the bloodstained soil of the Raritan Valley, has yet arisen to record adequately the deeds of those brave men to whom we may be sure many members of Continental Chapter trace their honorable ancestry.

These stirring events have always been kept alive in the traditions of the speaker's own family, but such traditions, however sacred they may be to those most concerned, are often skeptically received by the public unless supported by independent records and testimony. Since such support is now available we feel the time has come to record them. The speaker's uncle and father were born here on the old plantation, in 1817 and 1820, respectively, and both spoke of having seen the remains of the old fort and entrenchments, which must have still existed, therefore, later than 1825. They were the grandchildren of Captain Cornelius, a, soldier of the Revolution. Furthermore, there is the testimony of the following family letters that still exist.

Dr. Richard Middagh Vermeule, of New York City, born here in 1783, a son of Captain Cornelius and Elizabeth Middagh Vermeule, and a well loved grandson of Colonel Derrick Middagh, of the First Somerset, wrote in 1852, referring to Cornelius Vermeule: "My grandfather fed and lodged all the officers of one of General Washington's regiments about one year, during the gloomiest period of the national struggle, and never asked or received pay of the Government." Judith Vermeule Phillips, of Chapel Hill, N. C., was a sister of Dr. Richard. She was born here in 1795. In 1870 she wrote: "You have heard, perhaps, that Washington was often at our grandfather's, where he would watch the movements of the British while they were in New York. The rock, you know, bears his name as well as the spring nearby, where, the old people used to say, he would sit alone in deep thought." In 1815, another son of Captain Cornelius, the Rev. Cornelius C. Vermeule, then a professor at Rutgers College, visited Judge Bushrod Washington, at Mt. Vernon, and wrote a member of the Cadmus family, of this place, how hospitably he had been entertained, and evidently the Washington family, thirty years after the war, still regarded the Vermeules as friends.

The family record, therefore, fully indicates that there was a regiment here, that their officers were quartered at the homestead, and that Washington himself was often a guest there "during the gloomiest period of the national struggle", which was, of course, in 1776 and 1777. Now as to independent proof, the service record of General William Winds shows that he commanded a detachment of the militia here. On March 4th, 1777, while here, he was commissioned Brigadier General. There are many official reports that are made clearer through knowledge of this post, but your eminent townsman, Mr. A. VanDoren Honeyman, has unearthed the most conclusive proof. In publishing the Lewis Condict Revolutionary Abstracts, in the Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society, he has thrown a flood of light upon the history of this old fort and camp. The Abstracts are of the testimony of revolutionary soldiers themselves, and twenty-seven of them are named as having served at the post here "at the Vermeule's, under Winds". Moreover, they give much information as to what officers and what units were stationed here. Generally they included most of the militia of Morris and Sussex County and, notably, the First Essex Regiment and the First Somerset, under Colonel Frederick Frelinghuysen. In the First Essex was the company of Captain Benjamin Laing, made up right here in what is now Plainfield, and in the First Somerset the company of Captain Gavin McCoy, which included usually Frederick and Cornelius Vermeule and most of

the young men of the present North Plainfield. The records fairly bristle with the activities of Captain McCoy and your own Captain Laing, two most efficient officers whose memory should be cherished.

There were also troops from Hunterdon, the First Middlesex Regiment, under Colonel John Webster, and Colonel Oliver Spencer's Regiment. The latter often took part in expeditions from our militia post. We know that "General Wind's brigade", the nucleus of this garrison, actually numbered over six hundred men, its full strength being twice that, but in the militia one-half served each successive month, alternately. The entire garrison of this post must have fluctuated from about 1,000 to 2,000 men, being half as large as Washington's army was during the winter of '76 and '77. The Camp here was established early in December 1777. When Washington reached New Brunswick, he ordered many of the Jersey troops with him to proceed up here to protect the country from plundering bands of the enemy. What then happened will be told later.

Before taking up military operations at and about the old campground, we will trace some later history that defines its location. In 1799 war with France appeared imminent. Washington was again in command of the army, and recalling the post here to mind he decided to locate a regiment here and so the Government bought the old campground, comprising 85 acres, from Eder and Captain Cornelius Vermeule. The deeds, bearing date October 2nd, 1799, are recorded in Essex County. They definitely fix its location. It extended from near the present line of Second Street northwest to Green Brook. Its northeast line crossed the present Front Street nearly at right angles, 200 yards northeast of your present, Compton Avenue, and its southwest boundary was a third of a mile distant, well toward Clinton Avenue. Compton Avenue now nearly marks the center of the actual encampment.

At that time the Quibbletown-Scotch Plains road ran along the southeast border of the camp. At the house of Deacon Nathaniel Drake, where we are now meeting, it ran where Front Street now is, but opposite the present Grant Avenue station it turned to the left and went over where Third Street now is, following thence southwest past the home of Levi Lenox, toward Quibbletown. The fort was built to guard this road and the mountain pass at Somerset Street. Rifle-pit outposts further protected that pass and the one at Scotch Plains, in the manner of the time.

Now if we look the ground over we can still observe some of the reasons why this site was chosen. It was guarded naturally on the west and north by the steep bluff along Green Brook meadows and needed earthworks only on the south and east. Furthermore, along the base of the bluff there were several copious, clear springs, ample to supply a large garrison with pure and wholesome water. Again the gravelly soil afforded excellent sanitary conditions.

The personality of Cornelius Vermeule is closely identified with the history of this post on his plantation. He and his elder brother, Frederick, had been born at Bergen, New Jersey, where their father, Adrian, was voorleser of the historic Dutch Church. Frederick, born in 1709, never married and was less a man of affairs than Cornelius, who was seven years, his junior. They settled on the Blue Hills plantation in 1736, and before 1776 their holdings included 1,200 acres of fertile land. The plantation extended from the mountain over to where Eighth Street now is, and from near the present Spooner Avenue southwest to Clinton Street, while west of Green Brook it covered all from West End Avenue to Jefferson Avenue. The homestead was a great Dutch house standing near the present home of Mr. Brunson. Cornelius was a widower, his wife, Mary Marselis, having died in 1766. He was a prominent elder of Raritan Church, where he often supplemented the labors of the dominie, but his youngest son, Captain Cornelius, writes that he also frequently addressed churches of other denominations, so we know he was liberal in his theology. He spoke and wrote English usually, but read his bible and prayed to his God in the beloved language of his fathers. Once every fortnight he gathered his own family, Luke Covert's, Andries Cadmus' and the Marselis', some thirty persons, about his fireside for religious instruction.

In 1775, he was elected a member of the Somerset Committee of Correspondence, of which Dr. John Witherspoon, of Princeton, was chairman. This Committee was very active in organizing for the struggle. He was also elected a member of the Provincial Congress. This Congress had a long and most important session at Trenton, in the autumn of 1775, in which he took part but when, in January 1776, a second session was called at New Brunswick, he had his hands full with the work of his Somerset Committee.

General Stirling of Somerset and Colonel Winds of Morris were then at Amboy collecting and equipping their men for the struggle. They had no ammunition and insufficient clothing. They appealed especially to the Somerset Committee and old Somerset was stripped to meet their wants. So it happened that when Winds, who had also been a member of the Congress of 1776, came to the Vermeule plantation to establish this post, the following December, he well knew from experience that the patriotism of Cornelius Vermeule could be relied upon.

Throughout the Condict Abstracts the soldiers as "at the Vermeules" refer to this important post. They say it was "a large fort", and that a large body of militia was gathered here. It was then open country, the nearest hamlets which had names being Quibbletown and Scotch Plains. "Plainfield" was then merely used to designate the Quaker meeting, down at "John Laings", near where South Plainfield Station now is. This camp was in the Westfield ward of Elizabethtown, hence the records sometimes refer to it as "at Westfield", or again "at Scotch Plains", or still oftener "at Quibbletown". Furthermore, the name "Vermeule" was pronounced by the Dutch as "fairmerla" and no English scribe could ever spell it, so it appears in the records as "Van Muler", "Van Mulinor" and under various other disguises. This indefiniteness in nomenclature has had much to do with confusing the historian.

The earliest name we have found for this locality is in an Indian deed of 1683, where it is called by Benjamin Hull "Blondyn Plains", but the early settlers knew it for generations as "at the Blue Hills", a phrase of singular appropriateness, so we shall often refer to its as the Blue Hills plantation and the Blue Hills Post.

Now, in order that you may live over with the people at the Blue Hills something of their lives during those terrible days of the great retreat, we shall venture to quote from an unpublished history, entitled The Vermeules and their Neighbors'. Note well that last word, for the work has much to say about most of the early families of the Blue Hills and the Raritan Valley. All of Plainfield, Piscataway and Somerset County were covered with those neighbors in the days when that word meant so much. Let us look in first at the Old Dutch homestead under Washington's rock, and then follow with its occupants the doings at the camp.

We quote: [Honeyman, [1]]

"In those anxious days Cornelius Vermeule received frequent reports from express riders sent out by his Somerset Committee of Safety, and from militiamen returning from the scene of action to their homes at the end of their tour of duty, or because of wounds or illness. They were hoping against hope for something which would avert the impending blow, the real severity of which they realized little, for it was to be an experience thus far unknown in the Colonies.

Meanwhile half the young men were out continually, guarding the exposed front of the province along the bays and sounds from Bergen to Sandy Hook. At the plantation many trips were made to the lookout rock, up on the mountain, to observe the course of events. September 12th, 1776, when New York had been evacuated, a great fire lit up the eastern sky as the city burned. General Mercer, and his ‘flying camp' were ordered to Fort Lee, and all available militiamen hurried to Bergen County. Then followed the disheartening news that the army was in full retreat. October 5th, on a Saturday evening, there was another great light in the east. It was at Bergen, the boyhood home of Cornelius and Frederick Vermeule, Ide Marselis and Andries Cadmus, where their old friends were burning hay, grain and other stores, to keep them from the enemy, so at the Blue Hills there was sadness and foreboding.

His successive defeats brought Washington to Hackensack, November 19th, and the great retreat across the Jerseys began. Acquackanonck Bridge was crossed and destroyed on the 22nd, and the Americans stood fast at Newark to the 28th. As they left, the enemy, under Cornwallis, entered, and that hitherto peaceful, pleasant town was pillaged. Washington proceeded through Elizabethtown to New Brunswick, where he tarried until the 30th. His army had dwindled to 2,500 troops of the line, but with him on the retreat were fully 1,500 of the Jersey line and militia [2]. Too often, and too carelessly, has it been written that few Jerseymen remained true to the cause at this trying time? If all who abandoned Washington's army were Jerseymen, the original contribution thereto from the twelve other colonies must have been

small indeed. Much of the falling away was due to the short enlistments, the terms of a large number of troops of the line having expired in November and December, when there was little to encourage the men to remain. A large part of those remaining with the Commander-in-Chief were Jerseymen, and several companies of the First Somerset continued with him to Princeton. Of these, Captain Gavin McCoy's company and some others returned under orders to protect the country and to prepare outposts and winter quarters at Cornelius Vermeule's.

Before leaving New Brunswick, Washington had detached General Matthias Williamson, with the Militia battalions of Colonels Edward Thomas of Essex, Symmes of Sussex and Ford of Morris, under orders to proceed toward the Short Hills and Morristown and protect the country there from plundering bands. So it came about that Cornelius Vermeule and his militiamen at the Blue Hills had large accessions early in December. Colonel Thomas was of the First Essex, to which Captain Benjamin Laing's company belonged, so with him came Lieutenant Eder Vermeule and many of the Blue Hills' men. In all, the battalion had two Bergen, three Essex and two Morris Companies. Colonel Jacob Ford's battalion was likewise from Bergen, Essex and Morris, but it went on through the Blue Hills to Morristown, as did that of Symmes. General Williamson, the First Essex and the First Somerset men well knew the importance of guarding the several gaps at Middlebrook, Stony Brook and Scotch Plains; and the availability of the Vermeule lands as an outpost in a future line of defense of the country west, so a fortified camp was established on the Westfield part of the plantation, between Green Brook and the Scotch Plains Road.

During those days when Washington was retreating from Hackensack to New Brunswick, a steady stream of soldiers from Jersey, Pennsylvania and farther south, came down through Springfield and Scotch Plains, across the plantation, making their way homeward, very weary, ill-clad and disheartened. At the same time hundreds of aged men, women and children, from Woodbridge, Piscataway and New Brunswick, fled westward through the passes to friends beyond the Blue Hills, or to improvised shelter along their wooded heights. Whole families carried their more treasured possessions and as many comforts as possible with them. Not a few found temporary shelter at the plantation, and others with the Quaker families at the north and east.

Finally, in these last days of November came the retreating left wing of Washington's army, footsore, mud-bedraggled and hard pressed by the enemy. A large body of Hessians was at Springfield on the 29th, and December 5th they reached Bound Brook en route to Trenton [3]. The contrast they presented to the retreating Americans was so striking as to leave little hope of success among the patriots; for they were thoroughly armed and equipped, and their discipline was perfect. They looted at Bound Brook, but not at the Blue Hills, where their progress had been necessarily slow and cautious. The militia there were on guard, cover was plentiful and they had spent a week in advancing a distance, which could have been easily covered in less than two days' march.

Meanwhile, Washington proceeded to Princeton and across the Delaware with his dwindling remnant of an army, while the Jerseymen gathered at the Blue Hills to redeem some of their lost territory. Their orders were to attack the enemy's right flank and rear, as opportunity offered. Two most efficient officers of the New Jersey line now appeared among them. General William Maxwell and Colonel William Winds had recently returned from the Northern Expedition, where they had fought at Lake George, Ticonderoga, and Crown Point, with their Jersey troops. Winds had succeeded Lord Stirling in command of the Eastern Battalion before leaving for the North, while Maxwell had commanded the Western Battalion. Their term of enlistment having expired, these forces had been discharged on reaching home at the end of their northern tour. Now, the Second New Jersey Establishment took the field, and Maxwell was at the head of his famous Jersey brigade, having been made a Brigadier General in October. General Williamson resigned December 20th, and Maxwell temporarily took his place, having command of the Jersey line and some eight hundred of the Militia at Morristown. Colonel Winds was now given command at the Blue Hills. General Philemon Dickinsan soon became senior officer in command of all the Jersey Militia, including the detachment at the Blue Hills. Dickinson had his headquarters just south of the Raritan Church, across Van Vechten's bridge and near Somerset Court house.

Colonel Winds and his staff were quartered at the Vermeule homestead, where all was bustle, for they were building a, large fort at the camp. Every resource of the plantation and of the Blue Hills, from Scotch

Plains to Quibbletown, in horses, cattle, slaves, and material was drawn upon; and the stentorian voice of Winds resounded along the mountain as he urged his men to hasten their work. Eder Vermeule's new house and the new mill on Green Brook stood just north of the camp and were given over to the use of the army. A little farther north, at the west side of the Scotch Plains road, stood the home of Nathaniel Drake. South, along the highway, were those of the Covert, Pound and Marselis families; immediately south Levi Lenox lived on a small farm, while half a mile farther east, near Cedar Brook, stood the farm of that sturdy, active, efficient patriot, Captain Benjamin Laing, whose company of Blue Hills men was under arms at the camp. Eder Vermeule was his lieutenant. Over the brook, half a mile west of the fort was the Vermeule homestead, with its great Dutch barns, slave quarters and abundant equipment. Here Frederick, Jr., and Cornelius, Jr., both of the First Somerset, lived with their father, Cornelius, and their uncle, Frederick. Not quite half a mile west, along the road leading over the mountain, stood the well-stocked home of the eldest son, Adrian, minute man and dispatch rider, the right hand of the father, Cornelius, in the work of the Committee of Safety. Northeast, half a mile, was the homestead of Andries Cadmus, now 43 years old, with a. family of children, all too young to fight. Next, north of him, was the farm and home of Isaac Manning, whose grandson, Isaac, of the First Somerset was the friend and companion in arms of Cornelius Vermeule, Jr. The Blue Hills plantation, with its vast resources of grain and forage, its slaves, oxen, cattle, horses, wagons and men, was a valuable support to Colonel Winds and his camp. Its two mills on Green Brook furnished flour, feed and sawed lumber, its forest logs and firewood.

Up back of Springfield, at the pass on the road going over to Chatham [4], Colonel Jacob Ford and Major Oliver Spencer commanded a militia post in the new line of defense, with about one thousand men. On the 17th, the enemy advanced from Elizabethtown and attacked. The militia, at the Blue Hills rushed to Spencer's aid and the British were driven back. For the first time since the great retreat began, they fled before the Americans. This was like wine to the spirits of the Jerseymen, for they had vanquished Leslie's brigade of more than 1,200 British troops, with 400 Waldeckers, whose front had extended from Vauxhall, through Springfield, toward Westfield. The gallant Spencer had his horse shot under him but, undaunted, he carried on.

Better news soon came, for on the 26th Washington defeated the Hessians at Trenton and took 900 prisoners. Next came rumors of peril to his army at Assunpink, but immediately after, on January 3rd, in the early morning, there came rolling along the Blue Hills the sound of guns at Princeton, and in the afternoon express riders brought news of another victory. Following hard upon them came Washington, down the Millstone with his army, and Sunday, the 5th, he rested at Pluckamin.

Meanwhile, Maxwell, Dickinson and the Jersey militia had not been idle. They were preparing to put a limit to the marauding of Cornwallis' patrols and forages. On this very Sunday Major Spencer advanced at Springfield and defeated a body of Waldeckers, killing ten and taking forty prisoners. Spencer again distinguished himself and won a Colonel's Commission.

Immediately Maxwell struck again at Newark, Elizabethtown and Spanktown [5], drove back the enemy and captured stores of value. It was Colonel Winds and the militia forces from the post at the Blue Hills who were sent against the British at Spanktown, and among those with them was Captain Ebenezer Tingley, of the First Somerset. Three days later Essex County was once more within the American lines. Even before he left New Brunswick, Washington knew that the militia were collecting at the Blue Hills and toward Morristown, but he did not realize to what purpose. Before he was back at Morristown, without this aid, and in a little over one month, Maxwell's brigade of Jerseymen and the militia under General Philemon Dickinson had established a firm line of defense, hemming Cornwallis in on the north and west. It ran along the Essex-Middlesex line from Rahway to Ash Swamp and the Blue Hills fort, thence along the mountain to Bound Brook and up the Millstone to Princeton. General Maxwell himself was now posted at Elizabethtown; Colonel Moses Jaques was at Rahway; Colonel Winds was joined at the Blue Hills fort by Colonel Oliver Spencer's command; General Lincoln was sent with some line troops to command the exposed post at Bound Brook, and General Philemon Dickinson, in command of all the Jersey Militia, had his headquarters near Somerset Court house. General Sullivan now took general command of the few Continental troops, cooperating with Dickinson's Militia along this line of outposts [6].

On his great retreat, embittered and discouraged by his reverses, Washington, with a deficient intelligence service, had complained that the Jersey Militia were not rallying to his support, while his troops of the line were dwindling to a handful. Now, when he reaches Morristown, January 6th, he finds his little, destitute army protected by a curtain of those same Jersey troops, and the enemy is confined to the vicinity of New Brunswick and Amboy, where his activities are limited to foraging expeditions in the neighboring townships, each of which costs him loss of men and equipment. From this time Washington's reports and letters contain warm commendations of the Jersey Militia, and also of the people about his camp, who did all in their power to aid his army with provisions, munitions and shelter [7].

After January 6th, 1777, Washington and his army were at Morristown. The post on the Vermeule plantation was at a salient in the British foraging limits, on the direct route from New Brunswick to Morristown, and almost exactly midway between the hostile armies. Stony Brook gap, right back of the fort, afforded an easy pass through the Blue Hills, and Washington's camp in the Loantaka Valley was but ten miles distant. So it was the fortune of the Blue Hills garrison to be kept very active opposing the patrols and foraging parties sent out from New Brunswick. The British, and still more by the refugee Tories, many of whom had been proscribed by the County Committees of Correspondence, marked Cornelius Vermeule, like all his fellow members of the Provincial Congress and Committee of Safety and Correspondence, for punishment. But it was not easy to reach Cornelius because of the strong militia post on his plantation.

Adrian, his eldest son, was his right hand in scouting, carrying dispatches and organizing surveillance of the Loyalists. On January 7th he had been out towards the enemy's base at New Brunswick, and riding hard found his horse exhausted. He stopped at Richard Field's for a fresh mount. Richard and his wife, Elizabeth (Smock), had four sons [8], who were friends and companions of the four sons of Cornelius Vermeule. They, too, were all active in the militia. The two families were very intimate and, furthermore, the third son, Richard, Jr., was now courting Dinah, the youngest daughter of Cornelius Vermeule, so it came about that he let Adrian ride his own favorite blooded mare and went with him homeward. Near Quibbletown the enemy surprised them. Adrian was wounded and carried off a prisoner. Richard escaped and brought the bad news to his cousin, Elizabeth, Adrian's wife, and his father, Cornelius [9]. Although much influence of Cornelius' friends and relatives was brought to bear to save Adrian, it availed nothing. The long-sought opportunity to punish him and his four sons for their patriotic activities had come, and Adrian languished in the foul sugar house in New York until death set him free on March 9th following. Meanwhile hearts bled at the Blue Hills plantation. Elizabeth and three small children waited in vain for the return of the beloved husband and father, while Cornelius aged rapidly with grief and anxiety. When all was over he repeated, as he had so often before, in the loved speech of his fathers:

Onze Vader, Die in den hemel zijt. Um wil geschiede.[10]

But despite their grief they carried on, and although the relentless enemy kept all on the alert, day and night, what they and their neighbors were suffering only stiffened their will to be free. The three surviving sons of Cornelius were now almost always in service, but he and his brother, Frederick, had about them Elizabeth Field, Adrian's widow, with her little ones, John, Mary, and Elizabeth; also Elizabeth Myer, the wife of Lieutenant Eder, with their small daughter, Mary; and Althea Sebring, the wife of Frederick, Jr., with little Cornelius, aged three. Then there were Cornelius' unmarried daughters, Christine and Dinah, to comfort and smooth with loving ministrations his weary way.

Meanwhile the incessant raiding and skirmishing continued. Many militiamen came to the post. There were Colonel Winds' Western Battalion, of Morris County, Colonel Oliver Spencer's battalion of State troops from Bergen, Essex and Morris, Captain Jacob Crane's New Providence Company, Captain Jedediah Swan's Scotch Plains Company, and Captain Benjamin Laing's and Captain David Pierson's Companies of the First Essex, all three organized right there at the Blue Hills; Captain Samuel Meeker and his Essex Light Horse, Captains Cavin McCoy, Benjamin Corey, Francis Locke, Jacob DeGroot, David Smalley, Richard McDonald, William Logan, Ruloff and John Sebring, all of the First Somerset. Of the same regiment was Captain Ebenezer Tingley, who had served with Cornelius Vermeule on the Somerset Committee of Correspondence. To his Company and that of Captain Jacob Degroot or again

with Gavin McCoy, from Basking Ridge, went Cornelius and Frederick Vermeule, Jr., Isaac Manning and other young men of the Blue Hills who lived on the Somerset side of Green Brook.

Middlesex had use for its own militia at this time, so most of the men at the Vermeule's were from Somerset, Essex and Morris Counties; nevertheless, close at hand, at Quibbletown were Lieutenant-Colonel Micajah Dunn, with his relatives Clawson, Joel and Thomas Dunn, also Elisha and David Coriell, and David, Nathan and Phineas Blackford, while over at Doty's Brook was the home of Colonel John Webster. Then, in the regiments of Middlesex were Cornelius Vermeule's son-in-law, Captain Jacob Sebring, the martyred Adrian's brother-m-law, Lieutenant Jeremiah Field and his eight cousins, William DeGroot, Captain Jeremiah Ten Eyck, Captain Jacob Van Deventer and many warm friends and relatives of the Vermeules, not least among whom was Colonel John Neilson, of New Brunswick. Furthermore, there were the Mannings, Drakes, Fitz Randolphs, Woodens and Laings of the Blue Hills, with their numerous Piscataway kinsmen. So a call to Somerset, Middlesex or Morris for help was always heard and it was well, for along the hills toward Springfield, or over toward Connecticut Farms, or again back of Bound Brook the beacon fires flamed out almost every night, warning of the enemy's approach. On the other hand, the light of burning buildings in Piscataway or Woodbridge even more urgently and often called the Blue Hills men to the assistance of Middlesex.

Already the enemy's losses in New Jersey ran to about two thousand, including many officers. Captain Wieterhausen, of the Grenadiers, had been shot dead on the bridge at New Brunswick, the lamented Captain Leslie had died at Pluckamin from wounds received at Princeton, Colonel Rahl was killed at Trenton, and now, on January 16th, General Vaughan himself had a narrow escape from a musket ball near New Brunswick, for which an intrepid militiaman paid with his life. The next day two hundred Jerseymen attacked the enemy's guard there, but lost some killed and thirty prisoners. The skirmishes now came so frequently as to constitute almost a continuous battle lasting some six months. The enemy lost thousands of men in all while many a home in the Raritan Valley mourned a father, brother or son. Although classed as minor actions of the war, in the aggregate these were most important, and they finally drove the enemy from the Jerseys."

From this post on Green Brook the Militia went forward on January 20th to the battle at Van Nests Mills, and February 1st to a hot fight at Piscataway. On the 8th there was another at Quibbletown when the enemy looted and destroyed at David Coriell's farm (now Dunellen). On the 23rd they attacked at Ash Swamp and again at Spanktown. March 8th they fought again at Strawberry Hill, near Woodbridge and also attacked Howe and his escort at Piscataway town. On the 18th and 21st they harried the enemy near New Brunswick and he complained to his higher command that it was becoming impossible to procure forage. On April 4th, 15th, 20th and 21st they attacked at Bonhamtown. On April 12th Cornwallis advanced up the Raritan to Bound Brook with 4,000 men and surprised Lincoln disastrously, but he was driven back and counter-attacked by the militia the same night at Raritan Landing. The 19th brought a fight near Amboy and the Jerseymen lost 20 men. May 10th General Winds attacked the Royal Highlanders and six companies of infantry at Piscataway town and indicted considerable losses.

These frequent small battles in Piscataway were sometimes very hot. Some paint our ancestors as supermen but it seems better to think of them as more like ourselves, so we will admit that one Morris County Captain from the Blue Hills post did start to run away at the battle of Bonhamtown. Melancthon Freeman threatened to shoot him and General Winds, in forcible language, ordered him back to duty. He obeyed and later became a Colonel. Your speaker mentioned this incident recently to a young Captain who had been cited for bravery in the Argonne. "Yes", said he, "on the front in France I do not believe there was a single Captain, however brave, who did not sometimes wish he could run away."

All of this time Washington was at Morristown, his little army of about 4,000 ragged troops being protected by the Jersey Militia at the Blue Hills, Bound Brook and Millstone. May 28th he came down to a camp near Martinville and Chimney Rock. His army had now grown to 8,400, of whom for sickness and various reasons, only 5,700 were effective fighting men. The British at New Brunswick numbered over 17,000 and they had 12,000 more at New York.

June 1st, the enemy again advanced in force up this side of the Raritan and Colonel Oliver Spencer lead a detail from the Blue Hills post to meet him. Lieutenant Martin was killed and there were many casualties, but the enemy lost a Lieutenant Colonel, three light-horsemen and four Highlanders, and abandoned his objectives.

The position of the enemy was becoming intolerable. The incessant attacks of the Jerseymen were grinding down his numbers and morale, and he could not feed his forces, so Howe came from New York and personally lead an attack in force toward Millstone on the 13th. Washington stood fast along the mountain back of Bound Brook, while the Jersey militia attacked the enemy. Lieutenant John 'Ten Eyck, of Somerset, and ten others gave their lives. The enemy lost 3 officers and 26 men, accomplished nothing, and fell back to Amboy, burning buildings to ameliorate his chagrin.

Now followed a most important battle at the Blue Hills post, and one that has received too little attention from the historians. We will quote again from "The Vermeules and their Neighbors" that you may see it as our ancestors did.

"Washington now came to the Vermeule plantation to watch the enemy's movements. The rock on the brow of the mountain there was a far better point of observation than Chimney Rock, after the enemy left New Brunswick, so he transferred his headquarters to the homestead [11]. On Tuesday, June 24th, the whole American Army moved down to Quibbletown in order to be in a position to support Lord Stirling, who was advancing toward Amboy to attack the enemy as he crossed over to Staten Island. With Stirling were Generals Conway and Maxwell. The latter moved his troops to support Stirling on his left. They had 3,000 men and 8 field pieces. Morgan, of Conway's Command, was near Woodbridge with his riflemen. The situation was tense; the militia hurried to the Blue Hills Camp, and it was resounding with the movement of many battalions, for suddenly it had become the center of Washington's Army.

The same day that the main army appeared there, the enemy at Strawberry Hill observed Stirling's advanced guard, just three miles from Amboy. Howe was already informed of Washington's movement, by the strong patrol, which had fought the Americans at Quibbletown the previous Sunday. Thinking his opportunity had come to entrap the American army, he reversed his steps and on Thursday, the 26th, at 3 A. M., his entire army moved back toward the Blue Hills. Cornwallis lead the right column, proceeding via Woodbridge and thence west toward Oak Tree [12]." Howe himself moved later through Metuchen intending to fall in at the rear of Cornwallis' column, at Oak Tree, and then both columns were to proceed about two miles further, by the Plainfield Meeting House and about a half a mile beyond, along the old Raritan road. Here Cornwallis was to take a right hand road [13] directly toward the Stony Brook Gap, which he was to secure so as to be able to pass down between the mountains toward Middlebrook, in the rear of Washington's Army. Howe was then to continue along the old Raritan road, via Samptown, to engage Washington's main army at Quibbletown.

To guard his communications against the patriots at New Brunswick, Howe sent off four battalions, with six pieces of cannon, to Bonhamtown, on the Amboy-New Brunswick Road. Cornwallis, advancing through Woodbridge, soon came upon Morgan's riflemen of General Conway's command, who had as support three field pieces, and were posted just west of the village. The Americans opened fire but were forced back by superior numbers. The sound of this firing gave the alarm back at the Blue Hills, but the enemy found little surcease of fighting [14]. Shortly after Cornwallis passed Oak Tree, he came upon General Stirling, who had placed his artillery on the end of the Short Hills, to command the road leading to Plainfield Meeting. There was a sharp battle with many casualties, and the boom of the four field pieces reverberated along the Blue Hills. The Americans were again driven from their position but fell back in good order. Stirling's division and the militia took cover in the woods and brush along the Short Hills, protecting the roads east of the militia post, leading toward the mountain passes. The enemy advanced toward Quibbletown and was met by General Winds and his militia, from the Blue Hills post, reinforced by Colonel Cook and his twelfth Pennsylvania Regiment, and Colonel Scott. They bitterly contested the way, for they were covering Washington's retreat as he withdrew his army to his Middlebrook stronghold. The British advanced no farther than Quibbletown, for Stirling and Maxwell held their forces intact on the enemy's right flank, so they in turn fell back along the old Raritan road [15], until east of the Short Hills and then moved northward toward Westfield, evidently hoping to force their way around by Scotch Plains,

to the right of the Blue Hills post, through the mountain passes, thence along the valley between the mountains to the rear of the American Army. But their progress was stayed everywhere by the Militia who swarmed along the wooded Short Hills [16]. Their advance now degenerated into a vast plundering expedition. Every farm from Westfield village through Rahway and Woodbridge was looted.

But they had enough of trying to subdue the Jerseymen and on Monday following they evacuated the province. The lookout on the mountain saw this movement and reported it to Washington below, at the Vermeule homestead, and all at the Blue Hills breathed a deep sigh of relief, for the strain of the last two weeks, coming after seven months of constant apprehension, loss of friends and comrades, and privation, had been severe. That day when the whole British Army advanced directly toward the Blue Hills Post, the refugees again swarmed before them across the Blue Hills, a haggard, distraught, motley band, for all who could well do so had long before abandoned their homes at Woodbridge, Westfield and Piscataway for safer retreats. It was an intensely hot day. Many soldiers on both sides succumbed to the heat. In the morning came the boom of far off guns at Woodbridge, the advance of thousands of Continentals and thousands more of the Militia to meet the foe. Every Militiaman responded to the alarm; every man at the Blue Hills Camp was on tiptoe. The people at their homes, the Vermeules, their distinguished guest, and their neighbors, were tense with excitement. There was hard riding of the officers and the troops of light horse, then came the nearer boom of Stirling's guns over at Oak Tree - the sullen falling back of the patriots. Orderlies raced to headquarters to report; stragglers came in with vague, sensational stories, and then the bearers of wounded and dying streamed back to the camp. There was the tense calm of the anxious mothers, wives and sisters of the men at the front, the preparations for a hasty flight with the children to the hills, if the worst should happen. The ominous sounds of the battle approached, the rattle of musketry became heard, the stragglers and wounded came faster, for the enemy was now almost at the fort; then from out of the blue came a vague feeling of victory. The Jersey Militia was driving the enemy back, although unaided by Washington's main army, which had returned to Middlebrook. The firing and commotion grew less, although the troops from Somerset and across the mountains were still rushing to the Short Hills. Washington himself was now again at the rock and soon reports came from thence to the anxious ones below that all was well.

After the evacuation the war receded from the Blue Hills. On October 6th, 1777, the forts in the Highlands of the Hudson fell into the enemy's hands, and General Winds was ordered to New Windsor with all his troops, to aid the patriots of the Hudson Valley [17].

The old highway from Quibbletown by the militia post to Springfield, your present Front Street, is peculiarly historic, for over it Washington's Army passed repeatedly. The next time that the Blue Hills saw the army in force was a year after the battle of Short Hills; July 5th, 1778, it was returning from the battle of Monmouth. All of that Sunday and Monday the men and wagon trains, the cavalry and guns, rolled northward, by the militia post. With them came the First Middlesex, the First Somerset and the First Essex regiments. Captain Benjamin Laing, Lieutenant Eder Vermeule and their Blue Hill men came home from that terrible battle on the burning sands of Monmouth, glad to be still alive and to enjoy once more the loving ministrations of mothers, wives and sisters.

Again in June 1780, three years later, came the battle of Springfield, when once more the Jerseymen, practically unaided, drove back 7,000 of England's best troops. The fighting and the alarms continued from the 3rd to the 17th, and up the road by the militia post streamed the Middlesex and Somerset men. These were anxious days at the Blue Hills, for all the young men were out. Colonel Moses Jacques of Westfield, Captain Benjamin Laing and Lieutenant Eder Vermeule were among the Essex troops. Colonel Derrick Middagh lead the First Somerset Brigade, with which were Captain David Smalley's and Captain Jacob Ten Eyck's companies. Isaac Manning and Cornelius Vermeule, Jr., went forward with them.

June, 1777, had brought the battle at the Blue Hills and the evacuation of New Jersey; June, 1778, the victory at Monmouth, and now, in 1780, again in June, came another victory of the Jersey militia at Springfield and the last important battle on Jersey soil.

August 28th, 1781, the American Army came once more over this highway through Scotch Plains and by the Blue Hills Post on its way to final victory at Yorktown. Hazen's regiment, with the sappers and miners,

the artillery, stores, baggage and thirty flat boats on carriages, passed on through Bound Brook, Millstone and Princeton. It was the right column of the army. Just behind it came the left column on its way through Quibbletown and thence to New Brunswick. For two days they thundered by the old post. Not since the battle of Monmouth, three years before, had the Continental Army passed this camp, and never with so many men and so much equipment.

Cornelius Vermeule, aged by the struggle, survived the final roll call of Washington's army only four months. He was gathered to his fathers March 15th, 1784, but the history of the old campground was not yet complete. We have stated that it was sold to the Government in 1799, when a cantonment was built here for the War with France. March 2nd, 1803, Captain Cornelius Vermeule purchased his part of the old camp back from the Government. Sentiment for the historic militia post was so strong with him that in 1816 he purchased the remainder at $70 per acre, although the Government had paid him but $50. He had resigned the captaincy of his company of the First Somerset Brigade five months earlier, on Oct. 4, 1802. This was a grand occasion at, the old camp grounds, for he had served with his company 27 years, and now, after a, review on the parade ground at the old militia post, his men enjoyed his abounding hospitality and good cheer. His company printed the address that he then delivered, and an original printed copy is, or was a few years ago, still extant. This was probably the last military event at the old campground.

The ground on which your city stands is indeed hallowed. Would that I had time to tell you more of the sufferings and sacrifices of the patriots at the Blue Hills. Deacon Nathaniel Drake, who lived in this house, was 51 years old when the war came hither, and was an esteemed and loyal resident. On Feb. 10, 1781, in the midst of the struggle, he lost his good wife, Dorothy. His sons, Abraham, Cornelius and Isaac, bore arms, as "did his son-in-law, Benjamin Manning, Nehemiah Fitz Randolph, Luke Covert and his four sons, Eder, Peter, John and Luke, Jr.; John and Peter Marselis and Levi Lenox, all living close to the old fort. Up at Scotch Plains Captain Jedediah Swan, Recompense Stanbery, the Darbys, Craigs, Osbornes, Frazees, Bonnels, Scudders, Woodruffs, Piersons, Clarks and Lamberts did their manly bit for liberty. No region suffered more than old estfield, Piscataway and the Raritan Valley, and none turned out a larger percentage of fighting men . Around no single spot did they so often rally in force during the darkest days of the struggle, as round this old militia post and fort at the Blue Hills.

Footnotes:

[1] Lewis Condict Revolutionary Abstracts, by Mr. A. VanDoren Honeyman, Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society.

[2] After detaching several Jersey battalions at New Brunswick and Princeton, there were still, about December 12th, 1,000 Jerseymen at Trenton, at New Brunswick the total quota of the other twelve colonies did not exceed 2,000.

[3] Affidavits to claims for lost property show this body of Hessians were at Bound Brook, Dec. 5th, leaving early the 7th. They passed Van Vechten's bridge at Millstone, reaching Griggstown the same day. They looted from Quibbletown southward.

[4] This is often referred to in Revolutionary records as the Short Hills but so are the hills at Oak Tree. It must be remembered that the Short Hills are an irregular range of drift hills passing through both places and reaching southeast of Metuchen. Netherwood was also called Short Hills at times.

[5] Now Rahway.

[6] Essex County included the present Union county. Several battles occurred along this line of defense, at Millstone, Bound Brook, Blue Hills, Ash Swamp, etc.

[7] January 5th, he wrote "They are taking spirit and, I am told, are coming in fast from this State." But they were already organized enough to strike that very day, as noted.

[8] They were Hendrick, aged 25; Jeremiah, 23; Richard, 21; and Dennis under 16.

[9] Richard Field made affidavit that Adrian and the mare were both captured and carried off. (See claims for lost property.) A family tradition supported by records. By way of reprisal Ilia, a prominent Tory, was captured by the Americans at Quibbletown, during a later raid, tried and executed.

[10] Our Father, who art in Heaven, Thy will be done.

[11] See Historical note in N. J. Historical Society Quarterly, July, 1922, by Mr.. A. V. D. Honeyman.

[12] A careful study of the various military reports, and the roads then existing, shows that his route was - via the present Iselin Station (Penn. R. R.) directly to Oak Tree, and not via Metuchen, as sometimes stated.

[13] Now Plainfield Avenue.

[14] Captain Montressor of the British Army says There was a continued firing most of the day's march.

[15] The ancient Raritan road between the upper Raritan and Elizabethtown led from Bound Brook through New Market, Samptown, John Laing's and east across the Short Hills. It still is a highway and crosses just north of the present Plainfield Country Club.

[16] Howe, in his official report, tries to make it appear that he abandoned the advance because Washington's army had retreated, yet it is plain from his own reports that he intended, if possible, to work through the mountain passes and flank Washington. Clearly he could not do it.

[17] In a letter dated Abel Belknap's, Oct. 23d. General James Clinton writes General Wind's Brigade consists of about 500 or 600 men and is still increasing; they are stationed at New Windsor.